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(54) Title: METHODS FOR TREATING SEMICONDUCTOR WAFERS (57) Abstract The present invention presents methods for, <i>inter alia</i> , cleaning and etching semiconductor wafers with a solution containing ammonium fluoride and control of the process used for preparing such a solution at its point of use.		

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METHODS FOR TREATING SEMICONDUCTOR WAFERS

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to the field of treating (*i.e.*, etching and/or cleaning) semiconductor wafers with a solution containing ammonium fluoride
5 and control of the process used for preparing such a solution at its point of use.

Background of the Invention

Various solutions have been used to clean and etch semiconductor wafers. Recently, general cleaning solutions, and particularly solutions designed for oxide etching, have been prepared containing ammonium fluoride
10 as the primary cleaning or etching compound. In such instances, the semiconductor processing unit is designed to store the already prepared ammonium fluoride solution, which is then used when needed by the semiconductor processor.

Such solutions have been referred to as buffered HF solutions and
15 consist of a mixture of hydrogen fluoride (HF), which is a weak acid, and a salt of this acid, ammonium fluoride (NH_4F). Initially this mixture was developed to buffer dilute HF so as to obtain a constant etch rate over an extended period of time (*i.e.*, several days to weeks). Such solutions may be referred to as Buffered HF (BHF); the term BOE (Buffered Oxide Etch) is also used to refer to
20 these solutions. Therefore, the appropriate solution (*i.e.*, BHF or dHF) can be selected to optimize the specific etching and/or cleaning step to be performed.

It was discovered, however, that buffered hydrogen fluoride has slightly

different properties than dilute HF, aside from the buffering, which can be used to a semiconductor processor's advantage in several occasions.

The major difference between BHF and dHF (dilute HF) is the different pH of the solutions. BHF has a pH of around 3 to 5, whereas dHF has a pH of
5 around 1 to 2. Thus, the active species in the solutions is different.

The use of a BHF solution is attractive in some semi-conductor processing applications because: (1) resist is more "stable in" to BHF than to dHF (dilute HF) as a result of BHF's higher pH; (2) BHF has different etch selectivity than dHF (*e.g.*, BHF is used when the BPSG (borophosphosilicate
10 glass) versus thermal oxide has to be lower than the selectivity obtained in dHF; or BHF can also obtain the opposite if formulated right (*i.e.*, it can also offer much higher etch rates for BPSG than thermal oxide); (3) BHF offers higher oxide etch rates than dHF for the same fluoride concentration; (4) BHF also offers higher nitride etch rates; (5) BHF terminates the surface differently than
15 dHF; and (6) the higher pH of the BHF may in certain cases offer an improved particle performance depending on the particular action of the zeta potential.

In conventional BHF techniques, the solution is premixed and then employed in a wet processing unit. There are various problems associated with the use of premixed BHF. For example, particle formation tends to be an issue;
20 such particles may compromise the integrity of the final product. Etch uniformity is limited due to the high viscosity and surface tension of BHF, the high etch rate, and, in the case of a wet bench, the continuous etching during insertion or removal of the wafers from the processing tanks and into the rinse tank. Also, because premixed BHF is typically used for an extended period of
25 time, sometimes up to a week, there is the potential to introduce metallic impurities into the process liquids, which could again, compromise the integrity of the final product. Further, BHF tends to crystallize at temperatures below 16-17°C which poses a problem for commercial transportation of the premixed chemical from various locations (*i.e.*, supplier to water processing plant).
30 Because premixed BHF has a high viscosity and surface tension, a surfactant is generally required to improve its wetting properties and to reduce particle formation. Finally, with premixed BHF, one is limited to the premixed ratio of

NH₄F to HF, typically mixing ratios of 6:1, 7:1 or 10:1, limiting flexibility in processing. The use of premixed BHF also is expensive.

Although there are significant benefits to using BHF to treat electronic component precursors, there is a need to reduce the problems associated with premixed BHF. The present invention addresses these as well as other needs.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention provides improved methods for cleaning or etching semiconductor wafers, and particularly for oxide etching semiconductor wafers, using a cleaning/etching aqueous solution that contains ammonium fluoride (NH₄F) and preferably also contains hydrogen fluoride (HF)(or hydrofluoric acid). Such a solution can also be referred to as a buffered HF solution (BHF) or a buffered oxide etch (BOE) solution. The methods of the present invention provide for the preparation of such a BHF solution directly at the point of use of the solution within the semiconductor processing area, or "fab" by mixing hydrofluoric acid with a base or by injecting them into a process vessel. Hydrofluoric acid and ammonium hydroxide may be used to formulate the solution. In such a way, the present invention provides great advantages to a semiconductor processor. One advantage is that the semiconductor processor can incorporate the methods of the present invention into its operation without significant retrofitting because the raw material reagents -- aqueous solution of hydrogen fluoride (hydrofluoric acid) and aqueous solution of ammonium hydroxide -- are already used for other processing steps; thus, the present invention allows the processor to eliminate an entire chemical reagent (premixed BHF) from the processing area. Another advantage is that the present methods may reduce problems with particles in the processing system. Additionally, the present invention may provide improved etch uniformity over conventional BHF techniques. A further advantage is that the present invention may provide improved purity for the BHF solution with a lower concentration of metallic impurities. Finally, the present invention allows any mixing ratio at point of use providing increased processing flexibility. The mixing ratio can be easily changed at any run.

By using a point of use BHF solution, it has been observed that the particle counts were generally negative at 0.16 μm , typically something like -100 to -200. Further, using point of use BHF, etch uniformities of 2-3% can readily be obtained, even without optimization for etch uniformity. Problems of

- 5 contamination with metallic impurities and crystallization are minimized, if not eliminated using point of use BHF. Coinjected BHF does not generally require the use of surfactants and it also allows one to deliver any mixing ratio of NH_4F to HF, which is beneficial because it provides for added flexibility in wet processing techniques allowing etch rate and selectivity to be optimized for a
- 10 given semi-conductor process. Coinjected BHF is also more cost efficient because there is (1) no need for extra chemical lines in the clean room because the individual chemicals are typically used in other wet processing steps; (2) no need for extra chemicals to be qualified and quality controlled, again, because the individual chemicals are typically used in other wet processing steps; and
- 15 (3) no need for surfactant-chemical waste processing.

In one embodiment of the present invention, the method for treating semiconductor wafers with a solution containing ammonium fluoride, comprises the following steps. First, there is provided a source of ammonium hydroxide (NH_4OH) and a source of hydrogen fluoride (HF). Then an amount of

20 ammonium hydroxide is transferred from the source of ammonium hydroxide to a treatment vessel and an amount of hydrogen fluoride is transferred from the source of hydrogen fluoride to the treatment vessel to prepare a treatment solution comprising ammonium fluoride (NH_4F) and HF. A plurality of semiconductor wafers are contacted with the treatment solution to remove

25 waste material from the semiconductor wafers.

It is preferred that in the resulting treatment solution the molar concentration of NH_4F is from about 0.02 to about 20 and the molar concentration of HF is from about 0.01 to about 30. Preferably NH_4F is 0.10-10 moles/liter and HF range is 0.10-20 moles/liter.

- 30 The treatment solution may be used for various reasons, such as oxide, nitride, or titanium (without limitation) etching the surfaces of semiconductor wafers, or general cleaning of the semiconductor wafers.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 depicts the correlation between etch rate and fluoride concentration.

Figure 2 depicts the relative (fractional of the total fluoride concentration) concentration of the different species in a BHF solution as a function of pH for a total fluoride concentration of 2 mole/l (corresponding to a 14:1 dilution of $\text{H}_2\text{O}:\text{HF}$).

Figure 3 depicts the relative concentration of the species in BHF as a function of pH for a total fluoride concentration of 0.14 mole/l.

Figure 4 depicts the ratio of $[\text{HF}_2^-]/[\text{HF}]$ as a function of the dilution of $\text{H}_2\text{O}:\text{HF}$.

Figure 5 depicts CFM Technology's 8100 Full-Flow System, which is an example of a wet processing system that may be used for practicing the claimed invention.

Figure 6 depicts a vessel area of the unit of Figure 5 showing the slots where the electronic precursors are placed during treatment.

Figure 7 depicts a wafer held in a vessel in the CFM Technology's Full-flow™ system.

Detailed Description of the Invention

The terminology "reactive process liquid," "reactive chemical process liquid," "processing liquid," "chemical liquid," "active chemical," "reactive chemical process liquid," or "treatment solution," as used herein, refers to the reactive liquids that electronic component precursors are exposed to during their manufacture and perform some action on the surface electronic component precursors, as distinguished from a rinsing liquid such as DI water. These terms may be used interchangeably. When used in connection with the terminology "process liquid," "reactive" or "active" means, without limitation, a process liquid that has some activity in removing contamination such as particulate, metallic impurities, or organic from the surface of the electronic component precursor, or has some activity in etching the surface of the electronic component precursor, or active in growing an oxide layer on the

surface of the electronic component precursor. An example of such a reactive chemical process liquid is an aqueous solution of hydrofluoric acid (HF), which may have a concentration greater than 1000:1 (H₂O:HF).

The terminology "nonreactive chemical process liquid," as used herein, refers to a process liquid that does not necessarily have any activity in, for example, removing contaminants from the electronic component precursors, and may include rinse liquids.

The terminology "chemical treatment step," as used herein, refers to exposing the electronic component precursors to one reactive chemical process liquid.

The terminology "treating," as used herein, refers to some active step being performed on an electronic component precursors, such as cleaning or etching.

The terminology "wet processing treatment," as used herein, refers to exposing the electronic component precursors to one or a series of process liquids to, for example, clean or etch the surfaces of the electronic component precursors.

The terminology "rinsing liquid" or "rinse liquid," as used herein, refers to DI water or some other liquid that is used to rinse the electronic component precursors after exposure to a reactive chemical process liquid, as compared to treating them with a chemical. A rinse liquid may be DI water or a very dilute aqueous solution of a chemical (*e.g.*, hydrochloric acid) to prevent, for example, metallic deposition on the surface of the electronic component precursors during rinsing (using very dilute solution of hydrochloric acid). Ozone is another additive used during rinsing. The chemical concentration in such rinsing liquids is minute; generally, the concentration is not greater than about 100 ppm. The primary goal of the rinsing liquid is to remove chemicals or reaction products from the surface of the electronic component precursors, and not to perform some "reactive" process to the surface(s) of the electronic component precursors.

The terminology "reaction chamber," as used herein, refers to vessels, full flow vessels or single tank systems, baths, wet benches and other

reservoirs suitable for wet processing methodologies. This terminology is interchangeable with the terminology "treatment vessel."

As used herein, the terminology "full flow vessel," refers to a vessel that is closed to the environment and is employed in a "full flow method," or
5 sometimes called one bath systems.

As used herein, the terminology "electronic component precursors" includes, without limitation, semiconductor wafers, flat panels, and other components used in the manufacture of electronic components (*i.e.*, integrate circuits).

10 The methods of the invention are generally applicable to any wet processing equipment. Reaction chambers suitable for practicing the claimed invention include, without limitation, full flow vessels, single chambers, wet benches (baths), and spray cleaning systems. *See, e.g.*, Chapter 1: Overview and Evolution of Semiconductor Wafer Contamination and Cleaning Technology
15 by Werner Kern and Chapter 3: Aqueous Cleaning Processes by Don C. Burkman, Donald Deal, Donald C. Grant, and Charlie A. Peterson in Handbook of Semiconductor Wafer Cleaning Technology (edited by Werner Kern, Published by Noyes Publication Parkridge, New Jersey 1993), and Wet Etch Cleaning by Hiroyuki Horiki and Takao Nakazawa in Ultraclean Technology
20 Handbook, Volume 1, (edited by Tadahiro Ohmi published by Marcel Dekker), the disclosures of which are herein incorporated by reference in their entirety. A particularly preferred wet processing system is CFM Technology's 8100 Full-Flow™ system.

Semiconductor fabrication is described generally, for example, in P.
25 Gise *et al.*, Semiconductor and Integrated Circuit Fabrication Techniques (Reston Publishing Co. Reston, Va. 1979), the disclosures of which are herein incorporated by reference in their entirety.

The reactive chemical process liquids suitable for practicing the invention include, without limitation, aqueous solutions of hydrochloric acid and
30 buffers comprising the same, ammonium hydroxide and buffers comprising the same, hydrogen peroxide, sulfuric acid and buffers comprising the same, mixtures of sulfuric acid and ozone, hydrofluoric acid and buffers comprising the

same, chromic acid and buffers comprising the same, phosphoric acid and buffers comprising the same, acetic acid and buffers comprising the same, nitric acid and buffers comprising the same, ammonium fluoride buffered hydrofluoric acid, ammonium hydroxide and buffers comprising the same, and hydrofluoric acid and buffers comprising the same, and combinations thereof. BHF can be used at any time during a wet processing technique. The particular process liquids used, the equipment used, the exposure time, and the experimental conditions (*i.e.*, temperature, concentration, and flow of the process liquid) will vary depending on the particular purpose of the particular wet processing methodology.

The reactive chemical process liquids may further contain additional additives such as surfactants, complexing or chelating agents, and corrosion inhibitors.

The nonreactive chemical process liquids suitable for practicing the invention include, without limitation, deionized water or very dilute solutions of deionized water and/or chemical. Examples of such chemicals include, without limitation, hydrochloric acid, hydrofluoric acid, nitric acid, hydrogen peroxide, ozone, and surfactant.

After chemical treatment, the electronic component precursors may be dried using any method known to those skilled in the art.

The methods of the invention may be used for etching or cleaning the surfaces of semiconductor wafers to remove any unwanted layer or part thereof from the silicon surface, such as an oxide layer, a nitride layer, an aluminum layer, a titanium layer (without limitation). The present invention may also be used in controlled oxide etching.

The present invention provides methods for using a buffered, aqueous hydrogen fluoride (BHF) solution that contains hydrogen fluoride (HF), which is a weak acid, and a salt of this acid, ammonium fluoride (NH_4F). This BHF solution is used, *inter alia*, to clean or etch electronic component precursors such as semiconductor wafers, flat panels, and other electronic component precursors. Hereinafter, the invention will be described with respect to cleaning or etching semiconductor wafers as representative of electronic component

precursors. The cleaning or etching step accomplished by such BHF solutions can include general cleaning of the wafers, and is particularly applicable to oxide etching of the wafers. The invention, however, is not limited to such cleaning.

5 In accordance with the present invention, the BHF solution is prepared directly at the site of its end use. The BHF can be prepared in a mixing tank from its individual components and then transferred to a treatment vessel which is in fluid communication with the mixing tank, or the BHF can be prepared in the treatment vessel itself. In such a way, the BHF solution can be prepared
10 within the processing room of the semiconductor processor with chemical reagents typically used in other processing aspects of such wafers. This allows for the minimization of raw chemical reagents that need to be stored in the processing area, or "fab," and thereby streamlines the processing area.

A typical processing area for treating semiconductor wafers will have
15 storage tanks for chemical reagents, such as ammonium hydroxide (NH_4OH) and hydrofluoric acid (HF). These reagents are typically stored in their concentrated form. For NH_4OH , a concentrated solution will typically be about 29% wt. aqueous solution; for HF, a concentrated solution will typically be about 49% wt. aqueous solution. These solutions can also be kept in a diluted form,
20 with the lowest concentration of the NH_4OH solution being about 400 parts water:1 part NH_4OH and the same lowest concentration for the HF solution.

In accordance with the methods of the present invention, a BHF process solution is prepared directly within the processing area at the point of its use to clean and/or etch the semiconductor wafers. In one embodiment,
25 there is prepared a BHF process solution within a treatment vessel. The treatment vessel is in liquid communication with the storage tanks for the NH_4OH and for the HF solutions. A control valve and a control pump can be used as processing equipment between these storage tanks and the treatment vessel. In such a way, a processing control system, such as a personal
30 computer, can be used as a means to control and monitor the addition rates of each solution, the NH_4OH and for the HF solutions, into the treatment vessel to prepare the processing solution.

The BHF process solution will be prepared by mixing together a selected quantity of the NH_4OH aqueous solution and a selected quantity of the HF aqueous solution. The reaction of these two compounds will form NH_4F . The two reactant species are combined in a ratio such that there is a molar
5 excess of HF to produce a final BHF process solution that contains both NH_4F and HF. It is preferred that the BHF process solution contain a molar concentration (moles/liter of solution) of NH_4F in the range of from about 0.02 to about 20, and that it also contain a molar concentration of HF in the range of from about 0.01 to about 30. Preferably NH_4F is 0.10-10 moles/liter and HF
10 range is 0.10-20 moles/liter. The BHF process solution can also be prepared without an excess of HF, such that there is no detectable amount of HF in the BHF process solution, although it is preferred to have an excess of HF present.

After the NH_4OH solution and the HF solutions have been transferred into the treatment vessel to form the BHF process solution, the equipment used
15 to transfer those reagents, *e.g.*, any pumps and/or valves, can be shut down. The BHF process solution is now in a form to be used at the point of its end use to clean and/or etch silicon wafers. This step can be accomplished by any of the variously known contacting steps. One such method is to immerse the wafers into the BHF process solution within the treatment vessel. Another
20 method is to flow the BHF process solution over the wafers or to spray the process solution onto the wafers.

The temperature of the BHF process solution can be maintained between about 3°C and about 90°C, preferably between about 15°C and 70°C, most preferably between 20°C-40°C.

25 The process of mixing the separate NH_4OH and the HF solutions to form the BHF process solution can be automated to an extent. That is, the known concentrations of these solutions can be entered into a computer and a program can then be used to control the addition rate of each solution to produce the desired concentration of NH_4F and HF in the final BHF process
30 solution.

The BHF process solution of the present invention is preferably used in oxide etching processing steps to remove silicon oxides from the surfaces of

semiconductor wafers. The unwanted oxides include PBSG oxides and thermal oxides.

The preparation of the BHF process solution in accordance with the present invention at the point of its use within the processing area provides many benefits to the prior technique of storing a solution of NH_4F in the processing area and transferring that solution directly into the treatment vessel to be used as the process solution. For instance, use of the present methods may significantly decrease the accumulation of particles in the processing system. Also, the methods of the present invention may improve the uniformity of the etching process. In accordance with the present invention, any mixing ratio is possible between the HF solution and the NH_4OH solution. Further, the process of the present invention results in the simplification of the processing area because the space and equipment necessary to deal with a separate NH_4F solution are saved.

Without departing from the spirit of the invention, the BHF solution can be formulated at point of use by mixing hydrofluoric acid with a base, with ammonium hydroxide being the preferred base. Other bases suitable for practicing the invention include, without limitation, tetramethyl ammonium hydroxide.

The following examples are for illustrative purposes and are not intended to limit the invention.

EXAMPLES

Example 1

Experimental Determination of Co-Injected BHF Rates and Selectivity

1. *Experimental design*

5 In a first experimental series of 23 etching experiments thermal oxide and silicon nitride wafers were used to scan the entire dynamic range of mixing of NH_4OH and HF. The mixed or coinjected HF was varied such that the excess amount of HF (more HF than the amount required just to form NH_4F) for every NH_4OH mixing amount (or injection) spanned between 10% and 100%.

10 In a second experimental series, 8 etching experiments were chosen from these 23 previous experiments to investigate the BHF etching selectivity of thermal oxide etching versus BPSG and TEOS oxide.

Both etch rate and selectivity experiments were performed in a CFM technology 8100 Full-Flow™ System.

15 2. *Dynamic range*

The dynamic range for injection of NH_4OH ranges from 400:1 to 3:1 in a CFM Technologies 8100 Full-Flow™ system. In the presence of excess HF, every mole of NH_4OH will react together with HF to form one mole of NH_4F and therefore the dynamic range of NH_4F in CFM Technologies 8100 Full-Flow™
20 system is 0.0426 mole/l to 5.686 mole/l. If NH_4F would be supplied in a 40%-w solution, then this would correspond to a dilution of 254:1 and 1.89:1 dilution of $\text{H}_2\text{O}:\text{NH}_4\text{F}$ (40%w). Or alternatively said, the dynamic range of the CFM Full-Flow corresponds to NH_4F or NH_4OH concentrations of between 0.15%-w and 21%-w.

25 This dynamic range was explored while adjusting the excess HF concentration from 10% to 100% of the NH_4F concentration (excess HF is varied from 10% to 100% of NH_4F molar concentration).

3. *Experiments*

a. *Design of experimental conditions*

30 The experimental design of the first series of experiments is shown in Table 1. In this table, the injected ratios are shown with respect to a basis for HF (i.e., $\text{H}_2\text{O}:\text{NH}_4\text{OH}:\text{HF}$). The NH_4F spans the entire dynamic range of the

CFM 8100 Full-Flow™ (400:1 to 10:1). The [HF]/[NH₄F] ratio varies between 10% and 100%.

In a second set of experiments 8 etching experiments were chosen to run with different types of oxides. In each run 5 wafers were used: 1 native oxide wafer for particle addition test, and 1 thermal oxide wafer, 1 BPSG wafer, one TEOS wafer, and 1 silicon nitride wafer. The last four wafers were tested for etch uniformity and selectivity.

4. Results

The recipe for BHF in a CFM Full-Flow™ 8100 looks similar to an SC1 (H₂O₂, NH₄OH, and H₂O) or SC2 (H₂O₂, HCl, and H₂O) step. The step is called HF/NH₄OH. An example of a set of reaction conditions that may be used for a run in a CFM 8100 Full-Flow™ System is as follows:

	Condition flow	20 gpm
	Condition temp	35°C
15	Inject Time	60.0 Secs
	Soak Time	60.0 Secs
	Ratio Water	100
	Ratio HF	0.77
	Ratio NH ₄ OH	1
20	Megasonics ON	0.0 Secs
	Megasonics OFF	0.0 Secs

a. Conversion Calculations

From the volumetric ratio of NH₄OH and HF to H₂O in the recipe, the following items can be calculated:

25 If recipe input (volumetric ratios):

$$\text{H}_2\text{O} = a$$

$$\text{NH}_4\text{OH} = b$$

$$\text{HF} = c$$

Then

30 [HF] concentration injected in mole/l as HF

$$= c/a * 1000 * 1.18 * (49/100) / 20.006 * (a/(a+b-1-c))$$

In this formula it is assumed that the specific density of HF in a 49%-w solution is 1.18 and that the HF is supplied to the injection tubes in a 49% concentration by weight of HF. Further it is assumed that the molecular weight of HF is 20.006 g/mole. The $[\text{NH}_4\text{OH}]$ can be determined by

$$[\text{NH}_4\text{OH}] \text{ injected in mole/liter} = b/a * 0.9 * (29/100) * 1000 / 17 * a / (a+b+c).$$

In this formula it is assumed that the specific density of NH_4OH in a 29% solution is 0.9 and that the NH_4OH is supplied to the injection tubes in a 29% concentration by weight of NH_3 . Further it is assumed that the molecular weight of NH_3 is 17 g/mole.

10 **b. Discussion and further conversions**

The injected HF and NH_4OH will form HF and NH_4F . More specifically, this HF and NH_4F will further form HF, HF_2^- , F^- , NH_4 and higher polymers of HF such as $(\text{HF})_2$. Alternatively the same concentration of species in the vessel could be generated by injecting HF and NH_4F directly through the injection tubes. The amount of HF and NH_4F that would be required in the injection tubes (hypothetically, since HF and NH_4OH are really injected) to achieve equivalent concentration of active species in the vessel can be calculated. Equivalent amounts of $[\text{HF}]$ and $[\text{NH}_4\text{F}]$ hypothetically injected (if injecting HF and NH_4F instead of HF and NH_4OH):

$$\begin{aligned} 20 \quad [\text{NH}_4\text{F}] \text{ in } \text{NH}_4\text{F-HF scheme} &= [\text{NH}_4\text{OH}] \text{ in } \text{NH}_4\text{OH-HF scheme} \\ [\text{HF}] \text{ in } \text{NH}_4\text{F-HF scheme} &= [\text{HF}] - [\text{NH}_4\text{OH}] \text{ in } \text{NH}_4\text{OH-HF scheme} \end{aligned}$$

Therefore, the ratio of $[\text{HF}]/[\text{NH}_4\text{F}]$ is:

$$[\text{HF}]/[\text{NH}_4\text{F}] = ([\text{HF}] - [\text{NH}_4\text{OH}]) / [\text{NH}_4\text{OH}]$$

c. Conversion of HF/ NH_4F (molar to NH_4OH /HF (volumetric))

25 To convert a $[\text{HF}]/[\text{NH}_4\text{F}]$ ratio into a volumetric ratio of NH_4OH (29%)/HF (49%) the following formula can be used:

$$\text{NH}_4\text{OH (29\%)/HF (48.9\%)} = 1.8825 / ([\text{HF}]/[\text{NH}_4\text{F}] + 1) \text{ for } [\text{HF}]/[\text{NH}_4\text{F}] = 0,$$

this gives $\text{NH}_4\text{OH}/\text{HF} = 1.8825$.

Therefore, the maximum volumetric ratio of NH_4OH to HF injection is

30 1.8825.

5. Measurements

a. On the wafers

Etched oxide (25 points, 6 mm edge exclusion), etched nitride (25 points, 6 mm edge exclusion), particle removal ($>0.16\ \mu\text{m}$, 5 mm edge exclusion) on oxide wafers, nitride wafers, and test wafers (native oxide).

- 5 Particles were measured using the Tencor Surfscan 6220 in the CFM Apps Lab. The film thickness was measured using the Rudolph FE VII-D at Rudolph Technologies in Flanders, NJ.

b. On the tool

- 10 DI flow, actual volumes of chemicals injected (versus recipe volumes), temperature, conductivity at the end of the injection. Three wafers were used for each run. One nitride wafer was put into slot #22, the thermal oxide wafer was put into slot #32 and the test wafer was put into slot #42 (the slots are as depicted in Figure 7).

6. Results of 1st and 2nd set of experiments

- 15 Since NH_4F is made by mixing NH_4OH and HF the data can be represented as a function of NH_4OH and HF as done in Table 1. The dilution of HF with respect to H_2O is given on the vertical axis and the ratio of NH_4OH to HF is given on the other axis. A ratio of NH_4OH to HF of 1.8825 delivers a perfect NH_4F solution (*i.e.*, no excess HF). Higher ratios will form NH_4OH and NH_4F instead of HF and NH_4F .

[illegible]

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In the literature, H. Kikuyama, N. Miki, K. Saka, J. Takano, I. Kawanabe, M. Miyashita and T. Ohmi, IEEE Trans. On Semic. Manuf., Vol.4, no. 1, 26 (1991), it is reported that the highest etch rate is obtained for equal molar ratios of HF and NH_4F . In terms of volumetric ratios of NH_4OH and HF, this corresponds to a volumetric ratio of $\text{NH}_4\text{OH}/\text{HF} = 0.94$.

If the etch data for mixed solutions of NH_4OH and HF for a ratio range of 1:0.86 to 1:1.2 are plotted together with the etch data for dilute HF on a graph versus the HF dilution, Figure 1 results. Figure 1 illustrates that the influence of the $[\text{NH}_4\text{OH}]$ on the etch rate is increasingly important for dilutions of 100:1 and lower. At a dilution of 100:1, the etch rate in BHF is about 20% higher, at a dilution of 70:1, the etch rate in BHF is about 50% higher and at a dilution of 63:1, the etch rate in BHF is about 100% faster than in dHF solutions with the same HF concentration. It seems that for dilutions higher than 100:1 the etch rate does not depend greatly on the NH_4OH concentration. These results agree very well with theory.

In BHF, there are following species present: H^+ , OH^- , F^- , HF_2^- , HF and $(\text{HF})_2$. In dilute HF, the primary etchants are the undissociated HF molecule and the $(\text{HF})_2$ dimer acting as the etchant. In BHF, HF_2^- also etches the oxide. HF_2^- etches the oxide roughly 4 times faster than $(\text{HF})_2$ and/or HF. The presence of HF_2^- in the solution is strongly dependent on the pH of the solution.

At pH values between 3 and 5, the $[\text{HF}_2^-]$ concentration is much higher than the (HF) or $(\text{HF})_2$ concentration, as shown in Figure 2. However, this situation changes drastically for dilute solutions. The same graph is shown in Figure 3 for the case of a 200:1 solution, corresponding to a molar concentration of 0.14 mole/l. In Figure 3, the $[\text{HF}_2^-]$ concentration still goes through a maximum for pH values between 3 and 5, but the $[\text{HF}_2^-]$ concentration is always much lower than the $[\text{HF}]$ concentration. The ratio of $[\text{HF}_2^-]$ versus $[\text{HF}]$ can be calculated as a function of the dilution for a fixed pH value.

For a pH value of 3.6 the ratio of $[\text{HF}_2^-]$ versus $[\text{HF}]$ is shown in Figure 4. The concentration of HF_2^- only becomes significant for dilutions less than a 100:1, illustrating why the addition of NH_4OH to HF only increases the etch rate for dilutions less than 100:1. Even though the addition of NH_4OH to HF for more dilute solutions

does not alter the etch rate, it will still modify the pH which is important in patterned etches, where higher pH values are less aggressive to the resist. Additionally, there may be a slightly different surface termination depending on the pH, since there will be more F^- in the solution. Even though F^- does not etch SiO_2 , it can still interact with Si.

- 5 Finally, the addition of NH_4OH may affect particle formation since different pH values may result in improved particle performance depending on the action of the zeta potential between the particles and the wafer surface.

Example 2

BHF and CFM Technologies FULL-FLOW System

- 10 BHF can be made by mixing NH_4OH and HF, since NH_4OH and HF mixed will give NH_4F . If an over concentration of HF is used, then one obtains NH_4F and HF. In the CFM Full-Flow™ system, new software was developed to co-inject NH_4OH and HF to obtain BHF. Traditionally in mixtures of NH_4F and HF, ratios of 6:1 or 7:1 ($NH_4F:HF$) are most popular, meaning volume ratios of NH_4F and HF and where NH_4F is delivered in a 40%-w solution and HF is delivered in a 49%-w solutions. However, concentrations as high as 20:1 are also used in the industry. The 6:1 volumetric ratio of $NH_4F:HF$ actually corresponds to a molar ratio of 2.65:1. This can be achieved roughly by a volumetric ratio of 1:1 of co-injected NH_4OH and HF if the NH_4OH is delivered in a 29%-w solution and the HF is delivered in a 49%-w solution.
- 20 Indeed, in a 1:1 solution, there are 24.5 mole/l HF and 17 mole/l NH_4OH . The 17 mole/l NH_4OH together with 17 mole/l HF will form NH_4F and leave 7.5 mole/l HF excess. This gives a molar ratio of $17:7.5=2.3:1$ $NH_4F:HF$, close to the molar ratio in a 6:1 solution, which is 2.65:1.

- 25 This shows that co-injection of HF and NH_4OH in the CFM Full-Flow™ will require similar volumes of HF and NH_4OH to be injected, which is very advantageous, since now similar hardware can be used to inject both chemicals into the process vessel (reaction chamber).

What is claimed is:

1. A method for treating electronic component precursors with a solution containing ammonium fluoride, comprising the steps of:

5 (a) providing a source of ammonium hydroxide (NH_4OH) and a source of hydrogen fluoride (HF);

(b) transferring an amount of ammonium hydroxide from the source of ammonium hydroxide to a treatment vessel and transferring an amount of hydrogen fluoride from the source of hydrogen fluoride to the treatment vessel to prepare a treatment solution comprising ammonium fluoride (NH_4F); and

10 (c) contacting a plurality of electronic component precursors with the treatment solution to remove waste material from the electronic component precursors.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein said electronic component precursors are semiconductor wafers.

15 3. The method of claim 1 wherein said source of ammonium hydroxide is selected from the group consisting of ammonium hydroxide and buffers thereof.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein said source of hydrogen fluoride is selected from the group consisting of hydrogen fluoric acid and buffers thereof.

20 5. The method of claim 1 wherein said treatment solution further comprises an additive selected from the group consisting of surfact

6. A method for treating electronic component precursors with a cleaning solution containing ammonium fluoride, comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a source of ammonium hydroxide (NH_4OH) and a source of hydrogen fluoride (HF);

25 (b) transferring an amount of ammonium hydroxide from the source of ammonium hydroxide to a treatment vessel and transferring an amount of hydrogen

fluoride from the source of hydrogen fluoride to the treatment vessel to prepare a treatment solution comprising ammonium fluoride (NH_4F) and hydrogen fluoride, where the molar concentration of ammonium fluoride is from about 0.02 to about 15 and the molar concentration of hydrogen fluoride is from about 0.01 to about 30 in the treatment solution; and

(c) contacting a plurality of electronic component precursors with the treatment solution to remove waste material from the electronic component precursors.

7. The method of claim 6 wherein said electronic component precursors are semiconductor wafers.

8. The method of claim 6 wherein said source of ammonium hydroxide is selected from the group consisting of ammonium hydroxide and buffers thereof.

9. The method of claim 6 wherein said source of hydrogen fluoride is selected from the group consisting of hydrogen fluoric acid and buffers thereof.

10. The method of claim 6 wherein said treatment solution further comprises an additive selected from the group consisting of surfactants, complexing agents, or corrosion inhibitors.

11. A method for treating electronic component precursors with a solution containing hydrogen fluoride and a salt of hydrogen fluoride, comprising the steps of:

- (a) providing a source of hydrogen fluoride and a source of a base;
- (b) transferring hydrogen fluoride from the source of hydrogen fluoride to a mixing tank and transferring an amount of the base from the source of the base to the mixing tank to prepare a treatment solution comprising hydrogen fluoride and a salt of hydrogen fluoride; and
- (c) transferring the treatment solution from the mixing tank to a treatment vessel that is in fluid communication with the treatment vessel; and
- (d) contacting a plurality of electronic component precursors with the

treatment solution to contact the surfaces of the electronic component precursors.

12. A method of claim 11 wherein the source of hydrogen fluoride is hydrofluoric acid and the base is ammonium hydroxide.

13. The method of claim 11 wherein said electronic component precursors
5 are semiconductor wafers.

14. The method of claim 11 wherein said treatment solution further comprises an additive selected from the group consisting of surfactants, complexing agents, or corrosion inhibitors.

15. A method for treating electronic component precursors with a solution
10 containing hydrogen fluoride and a salt of hydrogen fluoride, comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a source of hydrogen fluoride and a source of a base;
(b) transferring hydrogen fluoride from the source of hydrogen fluoride to a treatment vessel and transferring an amount of the base from the source of the base to a treatment vessel to prepare a treatment solution comprising hydrogen fluoride
15 and a salt of hydrogen fluoride; and

(c) contacting a plurality of electronic component precursors with the treatment solution to contact the surfaces of the electronic component precursors.

16. A method of claim 15 wherein the source of hydrogen fluoride is hydrofluoric acid and the base is ammonium hydroxide.

17. The method of claim 15 wherein said electronic component precursors
20 are semiconductor wafers.

18. The method of claim 15 wherein said treatment solution further comprises an additive selected from the group consisting of surfactants, complexing agents, or corrosion inhibitors.

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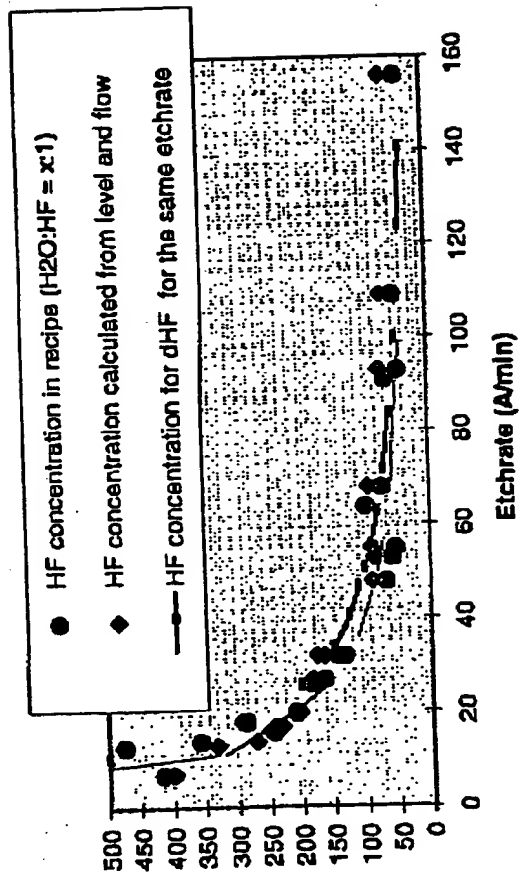


Fig. Correlation between etch rate and HF concentration, either from the recipe or calculated from level and flow.

Fig 1

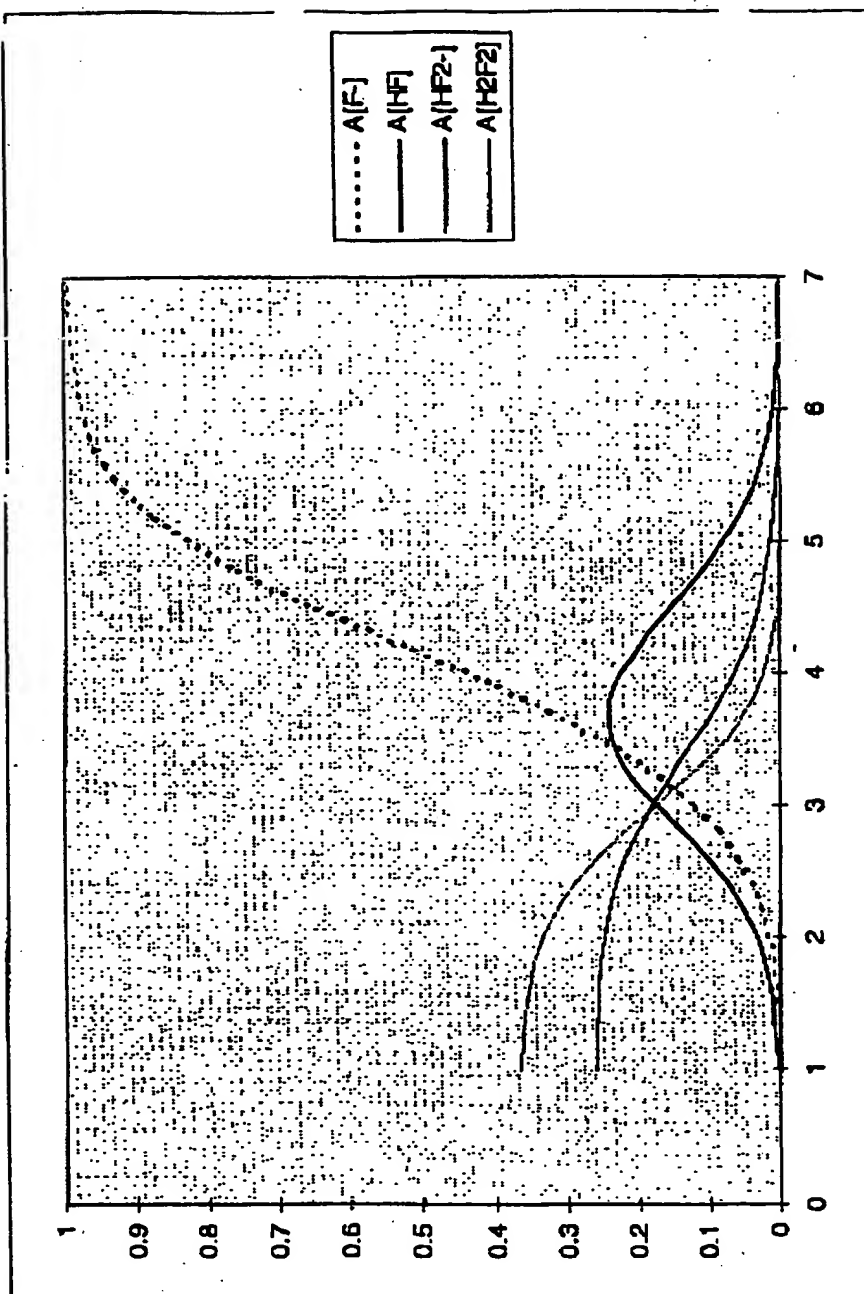


Fig. 2. Relative (fractional of the total fluoride concentration) concentration of the different species in a BHF solution as a function of pH for a total fluoride concentration of 2 mole/l (corresponding to a 14:1 dilution of $H_2O:HF$).

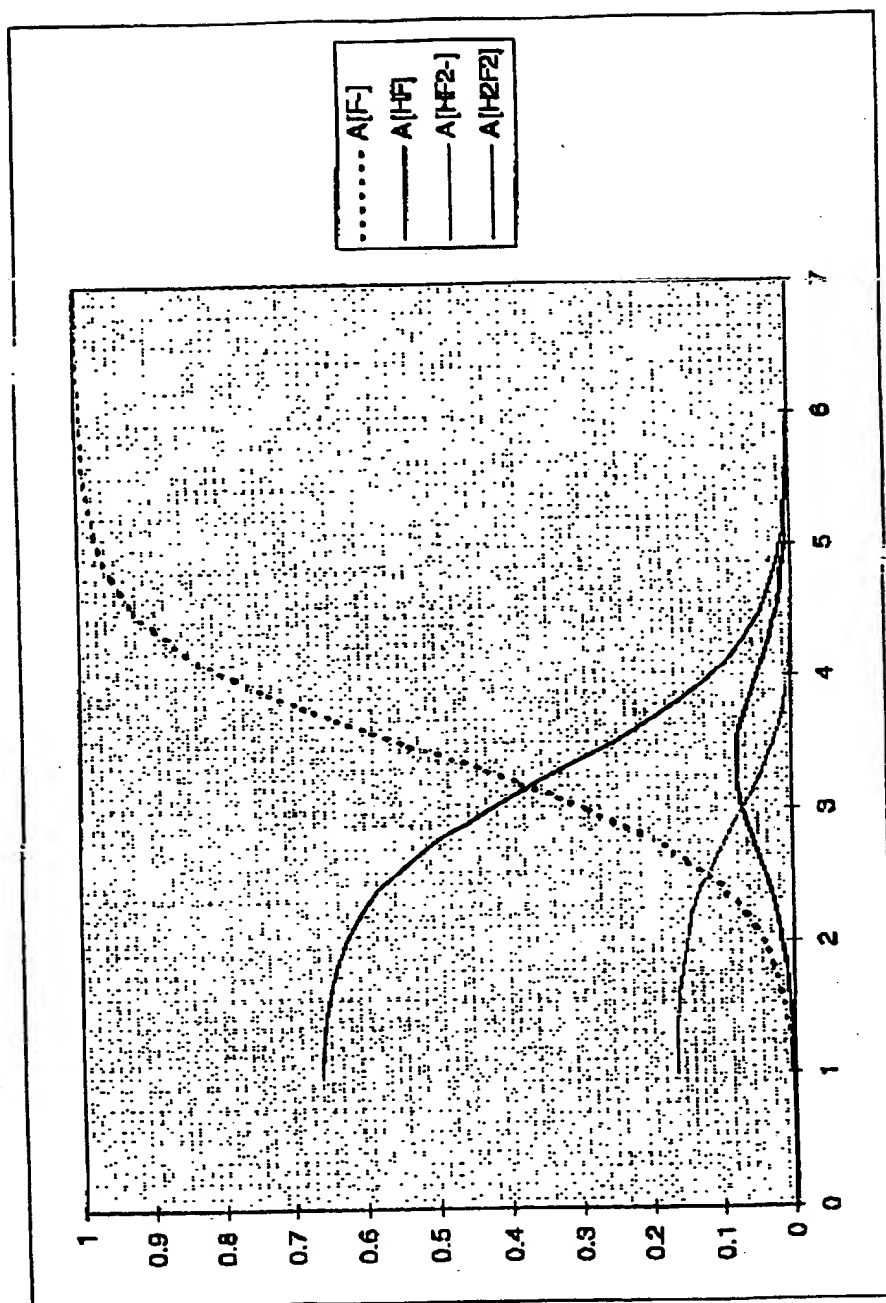


Fig. 3. Relative concentration of the species in BHF as a function of pH for a total fluoride concentration of 0.14 mole/l.

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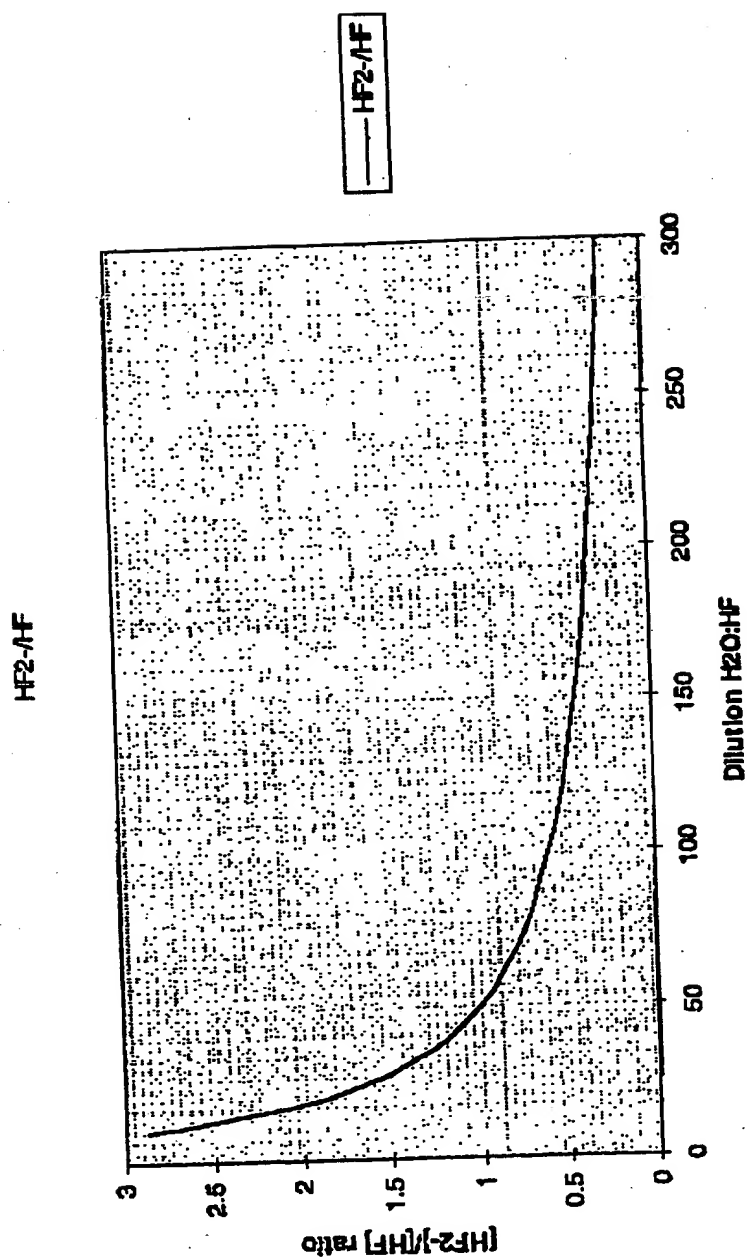


Fig. 4. Ratio of $[\text{HF}_2^-]/[\text{HF}]$ as a function of the dilution of $\text{H}_2\text{O}:\text{HF}$.

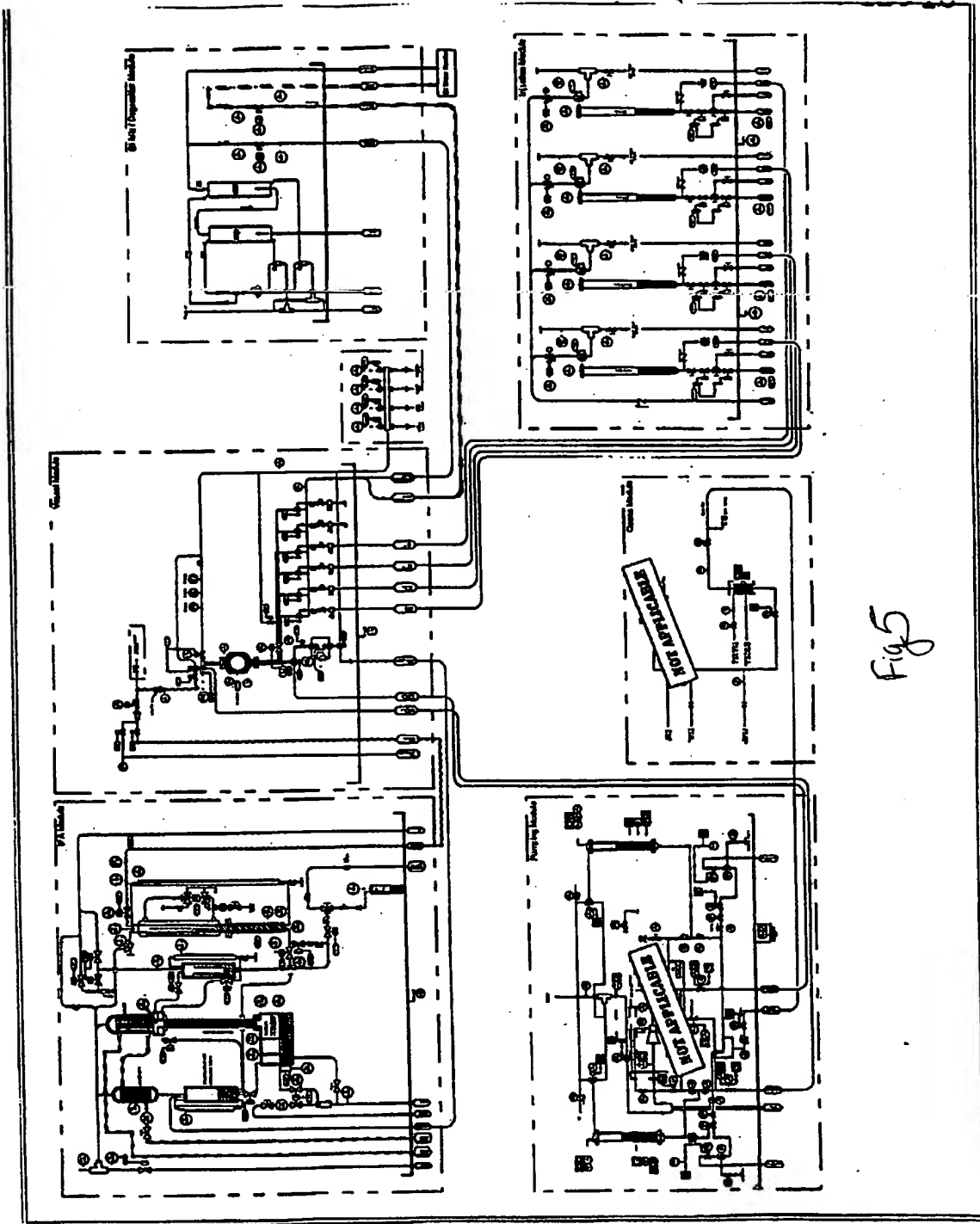
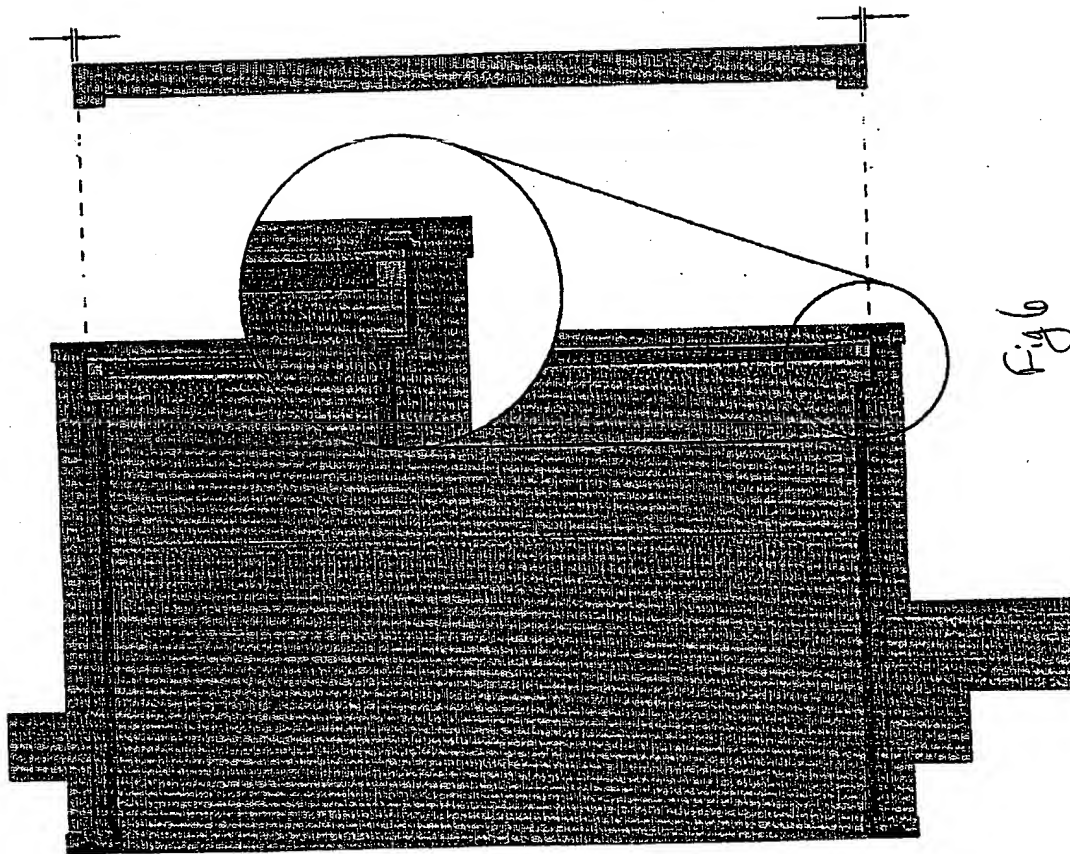


Fig 5



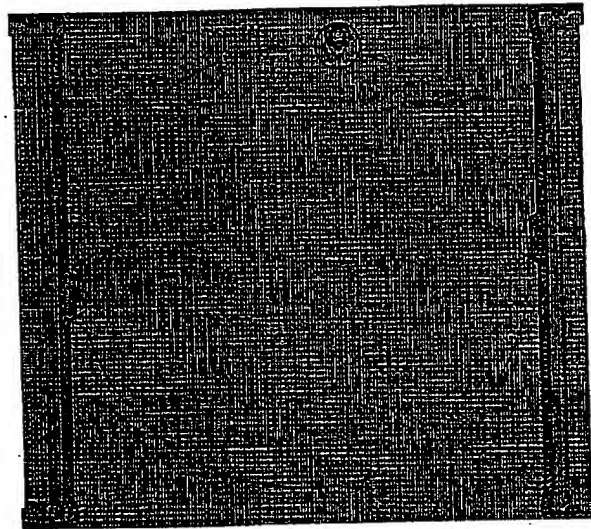


Fig 7

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US98/12310

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(6) : C03C 23/00; H01L 21/00

US CL : 134/2, 3; 156/625.1, 635.1, 662.1; 438/745, 753, 754, 755, 756

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 134/2, 3; 156/625.1, 635.1, 662.1; 438/745, 753, 754, 755, 756

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

APS search terms: hf, hydrogen fluoride, hydrofluoric, ammonia, ammonium hydroxide, ammonium fluoride, ammonium bifluoride, bhf, boe etching, wafer.

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	US 4,795,582 A (OHMI et al) 03 June 1989, entire document, especially column 3, lines 23-41.	1-18
Y	US 4,171,242 A (LIU) 16 October 1979, entire document, especially column 5, lines 36-44.	1-18
Y	US 4,545,918 A (PRALUS) 08 October 1985, entire document, especially column 3, line 45 - column 4, line 6.	1-18
Y	US 4,778,532 A (McCONNELL et al) 18 October 1988, entire document.	1-18
Y	US 4,917,123 A (McCONNELL et al) 17 April 1990, entire document.	1-18



Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

*

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document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

B

earlier document published on or after the international filing date

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P

document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

T

later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

X

document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

Y

document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

A

document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

06 AUGUST 1998

Date of mailing of the international search report

13 OCT 1998

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